

IBEI Graduation Talk (Barcelona September 6, 2021)

Ksenia Rodionova, Student of the Master's in International Development at IBEI

Good evening professors, students, guests,

It is a great honour to be here today, addressing the graduating cohort of the academic year 20-21.

I believe I am not exaggerating when I say that this year has posed numerous opportunities and challenges to all of us. We are a diverse bunch, from all backgrounds and previous experiences. We each have our own strengths and also our own fears and worries. But we all share a passion for (quote unquote) “saving the world”, sometimes forgetting that we need to save ourselves first.

I'll start with some of the challenges. While learning the nuance of apartment renting in Barcelona, figuring out what paperwork needs to be done for visas and NIE or TIE cards, which insurance is accepted and how online appointments or citas are an entire complex process of the Spanish bureaucracy, I heard the phrase “adulting is hard” as a sort of stress release.

Not to mention, that some of us have forgotten how to study since our bachelor's degrees and as a result of the past year we've developed a new skill of reading over 50 pages overnight to extract the key points in the assigned articles. We were sure to complain about the unfathomable workload, but continued to dedicate due effort, realising towards the end of the second term that a 2000-word essay (that took us about two weeks to write at the start of the year) can actually be done in a few hours. We've also been working on overcoming language barriers and finding multilingual friends amongst us, giving us the opportunity to express our frustrations in all languages we know on the beach over Laura's sangria. [wait] I apologise, as this is a reference better known to the International Development group. As a side note, a big thank you to Lorenzo, for helping create our Whatsapp group at the start of September, by emailing every one of us from the Development stream, before he even met us. This group has become a place to share information, ask each other for help and, of course, organise parties.

But seriously, this year has also given us the opportunity to explore a variety of eye-opening courses and a chance to appreciate the importance of the work we all aspire to do in our career paths. We are citizens of the world and international studies is a deliberate choice. I personally have struggled with the perceived weight on my shoulders to find solutions to the challenges of the 21st century and after speaking to some other students, I know that we all have our doubts and anxieties about how to do the right thing and find meaningful jobs that would help people in any and every community, without discrimination.

Social justice, human rights and sustainable solutions drive us to study more, form connections and search for answers to the questions which may have never yet been posed. And I urge you, friends, to keep this drive and passion throughout your lives, our lives. The choices we make matter. The work we do will make a difference. We don't need to all become prime ministers in order to have an influence on policies. We don't need to be Greta Thunberg to speak up about our concern for the environment. Every

choice is a CHOICE. And when you choose to act out of kindness, compassion, empathy and care, these actions WILL make a difference, no matter which job you end up in.

Finally, we can't forget the previously mentioned added challenge, yet also opportunity over the past year for everyone involved, including our directors, programme coordinators, professors and of course, students too. Yes, I am speaking about the pandemic, online classes and poor internet connection. But the desire to make meaningful connections and take the opportunity that this programme has provided by gathering students here from all over the world kept us going. This is why, despite restrictions and online platform failures, masks covering our faces and evening curfews, we still found ways to meet, discuss what matters to us, form strong friendship groups and even create an Environmental Student Association. This is the first student association at IBEI! - A special thank you to the founders Nausicaa and Julia and professor Charles Roger, who helped to make it happen.

Unfortunately, we, students, have also taken turns getting sick with the virus, having to overcome fear, while facing difficult decisions and learning to approach the topic with sensitivity and responsibility. This pandemic is a practical lesson, so to speak, because it applies in all our areas of study - development, security and research. It is a real example of how important international studies are in our current global world and how it is vital to work together in order to stand a chance at solving the challenges we face.

I have had the opportunity and privilege to meet and study with some brilliant young people in this course. I cannot mention everyone now, but trust me, there are many stories to share.

To conclude, I would like to thank IBEI and every individual from the Admissions, Academic office, IT support, directors and every one of our professors, all whom have had to adjust flexibly to all of the unexpected situations this year presented. A sincere thank you!

And I personally congratulate you all, students, for having the courage and determination to be here and complete this degree. I wish everyone success, with YOUR definition of "success".

Thank you.