

European University Institute of Florence is getting involved in hosting refugees

Florence, 04/05/2017 (Agence Europe) – Since April 2016, the prestigious European University Institute (EUI) of Florence has been participating in a project to host asylum seekers, in partnership with the Parish of Fiesole and the Italian organisation Caritas.

The Institute is acting as a first welcome centre for six asylum seekers from Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali), who are being housed in apartments in the same buildings as the Institute itself.

Having set off from Libya and disembarked in Sicily in June 2015 following a two-year journey, Doman Coulibaly, a 22-year-old Ivorian man, has been living in the Institute since the project began. Since then, *"I have secured humanitarian protection"* from the Italian authorities valid for two years, he told EUROPE on Thursday 4 May, at the first day of the 2017 State of the Union conference.

Coulibaly learned Italian alongside foreign researchers of the Institute seconded to Florence, he is able to attend Italian classes and gets involved in all the available social activities. The aim of the project is to make refugees independent as quickly as possible by helping them to acquire skills and accompanying them in seeking work, in cooperation with the organisation Caritas.

"This project has changed the way we see as human beings", said EUI President, Renaud Dehousse. The project is pursuing a *"long-term objective"*, that of successfully integrating the individuals it hosts into Italian society, he added. Msgr Andrea Lombardi, of the Diocesi of Fiesole, said that this *"specific response"* also allows a Europe that is *"too often absent and silent"* to send out a message of peace in response to the migration phenomenon that is hitting Italy hard. Caterina Francesca Guidi, a researcher at the Robert Schumann Centre, stressed that the Institute was the first European body or Institute to open its doors to welcome asylum seekers. What we are doing is *"building a Europe of citizens"*, the theme selected for the annual State of the Union conference. She went on to voice her hopes that this modest initiative would be emulated elsewhere in the European Union.

In July 2016, the European Commission proposed a reduction from nine months to six months, to run from the day on which the asylum application was submitted, of the maximum period following which a migrant may look for work in the country in which his or her application was submitted. The European Parliament called for a period of two months (*see EUROPE 11774*). (*Original version in French by Mathieu Bion*)