

International Conference on Justice & Reconciliation

Tirana | September 2–9, 2025 | Albania

The European Wasatia Graduate School for Peace and Conflict Resolution hosted a major international academic conference in collaboration with EPOKA University, Tirana, represented by Prof. Dr. Reina Zenelaj, on transitional justice, democratic transformation, and reconciliation. The conference, held on 9 September at Europe House, Tirana, and titled “Where Are We in Transition to Democracy?”, stood as the intellectual and political



centerpiece of the entire program, attracting senior scholars, diplomats, policymakers, and doctoral researchers from Albania, Germany, and across Europe. Opening addresses by Prof. Dr. H. Bilgin (Rector of Epoka University), Prof. Dr. Ralf Wüstenberg (Director of the European Wasatia Graduate School), Mr. Jan Maibom (First Secretary, German Embassy), Dr. Gentiana Sula (Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents), and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lisen Bashkurti (Dean of Epoka’s Faculty of Law and Social Sciences) framed the event as a critical intervention into Albania’s ongoing struggle to reconcile the legacies of communist dictatorship with the demands of liberal-democratic governance. Two extensive panels structured the day’s proceedings.



The first panel interrogated transitional justice and democratic decline, with Dr. Zeina Barakat (Executive Director of the Wasatia Graduate School) presenting a comparative analysis of truth and reconciliation processes, alongside contributions by Erjola Likaj, the Embassy of the Netherlands, and Epoka University scholars, who collectively examined the fragility of democratic institutions in post-authoritarian settings. The second panel shifted focus to local practices of transitional

justice, featuring empirical research by Dr. Hysni Skura, Beder University, Dr. Mentor Beqja, the Institute for the Study of Crimes and Consequences of Communism, Mr. Jetnor Kasmi, the International Commission on Missing Persons, and Epoka researchers, who highlighted the significance of grassroots agency and community-driven memory work in sustaining democratic reforms.

A further highlight of the conference was the launch of Dr. Ines Stasa's landmark monograph, *Transitional Justice in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia*, which catalyzed a dynamic exchange between scholars from Epoka University and the University of Birmingham on regional patterns of post-communist justice. The final session showcased innovative doctoral research, with presentations by Wasatia PhD candidates Steven Aliello, Finn Büttner, and Mazen Tamimi, and three Epoka graduates, offering fresh theoretical perspectives on grassroots peacebuilding, small-state mediation, and reconciliation mechanisms. By convening such a diverse array of academic and policy actors, the conference emerged as a benchmark for interdisciplinary scholarship on transitional justice, advancing critical debates that resonate far beyond Albania's borders.



This landmark event formed the conceptual and methodological apex of a week-long Summer School that combined archival fieldwork, interfaith dialogue, and historical site visits in Shkoder, Elbasan, Berat, and Tirana, allowing participants to critically engage with the intersections of authoritarian repression, religious coexistence, and democratic transition. The Epoka University conference not only encapsulated the Summer School's core objectives but also elevated the European Wasatia Graduate School's position as a leading global forum for peace and conflict research, demonstrating how academic inquiry can actively shape pathways toward justice, reconciliation, and sustainable democracy.

