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### Report to the International Association of Law Libraries, 24th Annual Course on International Law Librarianship, at The European University Institute, San Domenico De Fiesole, Florence, Italy, 4th –8th September 2005

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Libraries, 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Course on International Law  
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MARÍA M. OTERO\*

First, I would like to thank the members of the Scholarship Committee of IALL for giving me the opportunity to attend the IALL annual meeting celebrated in Domenico di Fiesole, Italy, last September. Our library has a limited budget for travel. We participate in the annual conferences of the American Association of Law Libraries, which uses almost our entire travel budget. In recent years, the opportunities for participating in good conferences are greater but our budget continues to be the same. That is why I think that the grants given by IALL to new attendants are a great way to encourage librarians to participate in professional development opportunities and should be promoted continually.

When I read the conference announcement last year, I thought that "The European Union in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: new challenges in law and legal information", was the perfect conference for me to participate during this year because our law library holds the only depository collection of the European Union in the Caribbean and also because the conference was going to be held in a beautiful place in Italy. I had visited Italy once before, but as a participant in a professional conference, one has the opportunity to see things in a different way and visit places that as tourists we do not see. The conference was also a unique opportunity to learn about Italy's legal system while enjoying its people, art, environment, and of course its libraries. The IALL conference presented a unique forum to learn about the European Union from its member countries' legal scholars and librarians.

The University of Puerto Rico Law Library was designated as a European Documentation Center in 1990 by the European Union. Thanks to that status, we receive their publications free of charge, something that otherwise we would not be able to afford. By this arrangement, we can offer

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this collection to our users as a free service, thus enhancing and supporting the school's curriculum; at the same time we serve as a center for research in the Caribbean. We are also a depository of GPO (United States Government Printing Office) and PARLACEN (Parlamento Centroamericano)

Puerto Rico's legal system is a mixed jurisdiction with its roots from the civil system of Spain and the common law from the United States. We have also been developing a growing collection of Caribbean Basin primary and secondary legal materials and an international and foreign collection to support our school's curriculum. The need to collect legal materials from countries with which our school has educational exchange programs such as Spain, the United States, Chile and Canada, is a major task, which requires us to be informed and updated continually.

With the advent of free access to information resources through the Internet, we have to deal continuously with the substitution or cancellation of print information sources that are being replaced or are available only thru computer or electronic sources. For an administrator, that is one of the decisions that have to be revised annually when working with budget planning. One of the advantages of attending international conferences is to identify new publications and new electronic systems, some of them free of charge, which would be too expensive to access otherwise in paper, such as the different electronic systems that I can now access from the Italian institutions.

For a law librarian in Puerto Rico, it is an interesting challenge to deal with other jurisdictions and our own mixed jurisdiction to become an experienced professional in Puerto Rico legal research. This is why it is so important for us to keep informed about the international legal and library developments and promote and maintain direct cooperation with international legal experts. The opportunity to meet face to face with the librarians that help us when we are doing legal research about a specific country further enhances our professional knowledge and capacity.

The IALL experience started last July, when I was at the meeting of the American Association of Law Libraries, celebrated in San Antonio, Texas. I participated in the reception sponsored by the International Association of Law Libraries and had the opportunity to meet Jules Winterton, President of IALL. I also met other members of the association. It was a pleasure to meet them because I could feel their enthusiasm for the forthcoming meeting in Italy, which made me feel excited also. Although I was traveling to Europe

alone for the first time, I was going to have a great time and an invaluable professional experience.

When I wrote a brief note to my Dean, Dr. Efrén Rivera Ramos, about the conference and the grant, his enthusiasm was notable. He is a professor of international law and a person who supports faculty and librarian research on that subject. He approved the leave immediately and sent a letter to the faculty congratulating me for the grant. This was an achievement and an acknowledgement for me and for the Law Library.

Traveling to Europe is always an adventure and, although I had a complicated trip due to a delay in San Juan, Puerto Rico, I finally arrived in Florence. I was impressed by the excellent facilities of the meeting place and housing. I stayed at the Centro Studi Nazionale di Firenze, located just 15 minutes' walk from the Badia Fiesolana where the conference sessions took place at the European University Institute. Trees and beautiful houses beneath the mountains of Fiesole and a wonderful view of Florence surround both places. The hotel was a nice and beautiful place and the staff were very kind and helpful every time that I requested their assistance.

I was very well welcomed by the executive members of IALL and was delighted to meet the other grantees, Harvinder Kaur from Malaysia and Hudson Liyai from Kenya. Both were the first persons that I meet from their countries and I was not surprised to know that, as librarians we share many common issues together. Meeting the other scholarship recipients was a pleasure, as was sharing our experiences as first time attendants to the conference. It was also a great opportunity to meet IALL members from the entire world, share experiences with colleagues and make new friends.

The conference program was of much interest to me because it was a great opportunity to learn first-hand from international legal experts about the advances in the development of the European Union and about the impact that it will have on my library. The first and second sessions were dedicated to the constitutional developments in the European Union and the EU copyright directive. The third and fourth sessions were dedicated to the Italian legal system and the *Ius Commune*, respectively. The program was intellectually provocative and interesting because, being an attorney and a librarian, it gave me the opportunity to understand the current legal issues of the European Union and learn about the legal system of Italy. Among the various topics discussed in the conference were:

- The Court and EU Constitutional Law

- Constitutional Development in the EU: The Past and the Future
- The EU Copyright Directive as compared to US Copyright Law and its Implications for Libraries
- Introduction to the Italian Legal System
- Legal Information on the Web: the case of Italy
- European Administrative Law: towards a Ius Commune in the Sphere of Public Law?

The organization of the conference activities was excellent and the social activities were very well selected and coordinated. Every place that we visited was an enjoyable and cultural experience in itself. Florence and its surroundings are one of the most beautiful places in Europe and the center of Florence is like an open museum.

I enjoyed very much the visits to the Uffizi Library and the Biblioteca Nazionale. It was an exceptional opportunity to see the books of art of the Uffizi Library and the rare books at the Archives of the Biblioteca Nazionale. The Librarians of both institutions and the Archivist of the Biblioteca Nazionale transmitted to us their commitment and love for their libraries and their national collections. It was an experience that I won't forget to see some of the rare books, listen to a description of their origin by the Archivist and learn about their conservation methods and procedures.

The visit to the University of Siena and its law faculty was an opportunity to learn about how a foreign law school and law library is organized. The building that houses this school is impressive for its architecture and its spectacular view of the surroundings. After visiting the school and library we toured the city of Siena with a tour guide who was excellent. There was a very interesting session at Casa Machiavelli, where we learned about the real life of the author of *The Prince*. A wine tasting experience is part of any visit to Italy and at Casa Machiavelli we had that opportunity.

It was also an opportunity to practice the Italian language that I studied in Puerto Rico, but rarely use, and it was a great surprise that I could understand more than what I thought.

I would like to thank the staff of the library of the European University Institute who let me use their computers to be in contact with our libraries and my relatives. They were very helpful and kind to make me feel at home. I also want to thank the members of the local arrangements

committee who were eager to help the attendees and made us feel comfortable and delighted.

After returning to my library, I shared some of the conference materials with the professors of international law of our school. I have also encouraged other librarians to participate in this kind of conference by sharing my experiences and motivating them to broaden their perspectives as librarians and as legal professionals. I also wrote a brief article to be published in the newsletter of our local law librarian's association, *Asociación de Bibliotecarios de Derecho de Puerto Rico*. I am also planning to offer, with our International and Foreign Law Librarian, a conference about international legal resources for the library staff and the faculty of the school.

I would like to encourage the Association members to consider Puerto Rico for a future conference meeting site and to continue sponsoring opportunities for librarians to attend the Annual Course on International Law Librarianship. I will make every effort to continue attending the association's meetings in the future and participate in their efforts to support international law librarianship.