

ACUNS Conference Report

January 12th, 2012–Panel on International Networks

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The panel on International Networks was moderated by Dr. Michael Platzer of the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) Vienna Liaison Office.

The first panelist was Mr. Peter Colgan from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) who presented one of the agency's guidance document published in 2010, which contains an Educational Program in Nuclear Security. It aims at building a security culture in a country and was created because the IAEA does a lot of trainings but saw that education is more sustainable. The document addresses two audiences, one is a Master Science Program and the other is a Certificate Program in Nuclear Security. To facilitate this Master's Program the International Nuclear Security Education Network's (INSEN) was established in March 2010, a cooperation between the agency and a couple of education institutions and non-governmental organizations as well as national authorities. The mission of INSEN is to enhance global nuclear security. INSEN develops peer-reviewed textbooks, computer-based teaching tools and instructional material, including field exercises. There is a Nuclear Security Informational Portal run by the IAEA which is a restricted site, where there are different user groups and different password protections. In September 2011 a professional development course for faculty members on "Introduction to Nuclear Security" was launched and a textbook on that module has just been finished. The curriculum for this course is two weeks of classroom training and distance learning.

Next, Henrike Landré and Julia Harfensteller from United Nations Studies Association (UNSA) introduced their Association which started off as an informal working group during the 2007 ACUNS annual meeting in New York. Its main purpose is to promote UN studies as an interdisciplinary field of studies that includes insights from practitioners and researchers. So far UNSA has been working on a conceptual level, meaning to elaborate a concept of UN studies, which can be used as a basis for the future field of studies. Besides, there have been several workshops and online conferences organized by UNSA. One objective has always been to institutionalize UN studies by proving platforms for communication between practitioners and academics. One major achievement has been a journal on International Organizations Studies (JIOS). The latest project by UNSA is UNSAnet, an online social community for UN Practitioners and Academics to connect. The challenge for UNSA is to address the needs of its 200 members and facilitate communication among them. Therefore, the platform makes it possible to publish material, textbooks and projects. It is closed to a limited number of community members.

The next panelist was Nikolai Sokov, Senior Fellow at the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP) which closely works together with the Monterey Institute of International Studies in California and the Austrian Foreign Ministry. Mr. Sokov spoke about the efforts of the Center for Non- Proliferation Studies at the MIIS to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to train the next generation of WMD nonproliferation

specialists. The MIIS therefore implemented its own individual faculty training for young and mid-career specialists, but also offers train-the-trainers workshops in Russia, China and the United States. The program, developed in cooperation with the US Department of Energy, aims at connecting nuclear security and non-proliferation experts in the Urals and Siberia by providing assistance, instructional materials, professional development and networking opportunities for faculty and students.

The next speech was given by Ludovico Alcorta, the Director of Strategic Research of United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Mr. Alcorta spoke about his own experience and started with the question of how to mainstream UN themes in academics. His first point was related to the current international context stating that the topic of development is not as attractive anymore as it was 20 years ago, partially because many developing countries have grown and become wealthy, but have not found their role in the international context yet. Also, a difficulty has been to identify a new global issue, which leads to a lower perception of the UN. The main point of the discussion was the need for interaction between the academia and practitioners in order to mainstream UN issues in academia. Requirements to mainstream certain issues are content, mechanisms and people capable of ensuring it. In terms of content there should be an international perspective concerning energy or environment for example. The lack of issues, that are perceived from a global perspective, but are close to our hearts is one of the challenges to mainstream UN issues, Mr. Alcorta stated. The way to find these issues is to look into the principles of the UN Charter: peace, freedom, liberty, equality and justice. Consultants, joined initiatives, exchange of individuals between the UN and universities as well as networks are fundamental mechanisms to mainstream issues.

The next speakers were Mr. Miroslav Polzer, Secretary General of the International Association for the Advancement of Innovative Approaches to Global Challenges. As former head of the Austrian Science and Research Liaison Office Ljubljana, he talked about his main tasks in this capacity. In 2008 together with ACUNS the ASO organized a workshop on building a knowledge-base for global governance, which was presented by Janez Podobnik (former Slovenian Minister for Environment) from the International Center for Promotional Enterprises. Moreover, ASO organized a conference on “Can the UN be taught” at the Diplomatic Academy. Last year, another conference took place in Belgrade on “Teaching Climate Change in the UN System”. The Liaison Office in Ljubljana has been closed, because the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research does not have the resources anymore. Most of the networks and ideas therefore moved to IAI, which has its headquarter in Klagenfurt and is concerned with the change of global governance to address issues such as climate change and sustainable development. One of their activities is the contribution to the RIO +20 consultations with the advice to achieve 15/15/15, meaning that global civil society should mobilize a budget of 15 billion Euros and 15 million volunteers until 2015 for UN lead sustainability efforts. This should help finance capacity building, education in sustainable development and research on global issues. On January 23, 2012, there will be an informal strategy development workshop in New York, in order to develop the conceptual basis for the Rio +20 process.

Prof. Christer Jönsson (ACUNS) talked about a book by sociologist Manuel Castells, called the “The Rise of the network society”, which emphasizes that with the revolutionary changes in information and technology, network has become the predominant way of organizing societal activity in today’s world. Jönsson stressed that it is not only a matter of information technology to say that there is a difference between the technological range and human reach. There has been a revolutionary change in technological range; distance is not a problem anymore. However, there has not been a similar revolution in human reach. Human contact is still needed as there is so much in the communication because there is no substitute for the human dialogue. It is interesting to see that the development of information technology has not decreased the amount of travelling around the world. Therefore, networks are a combination of internet communication and human meetings. The president underlined the importance of ACUNS as an autonomous organization, which is not part of the UN system but serves as a bridge between academics and practitioners of the UN. ACUNS was founded 25 years ago in North America and was established by university professors, who were dissatisfied with the fact that the UN did not figure very much in the different curricula in academic teaching and research. They also wanted a bridge between practitioners and academics. In the beginning there were exchange programs, unfortunately they do not exist anymore because of a lack of money and time. Mr. Jönsson stressed the importance of the annual meetings providing the opportunity for young researchers to present their research and papers in workshops.

Prof. Ingrid Marboe, Professor of International Law at the University of Vienna and Director of the Erasmus Program, highlighted the importance of exchange programs for the professional development of future practitioners and mentioned the Erasmus exchange program, which offers 150 places around Europe for students to study at another university. A more international network is offered to Australian students, who can spend three months in Vienna and take courses at the university. It has been a challenge to decide about the curriculum, reported Marboe. The courses are taught in English. There also exists a cooperation of the University of Vienna with the UN in matters of space law; and UN practitioners are invited to hold lectures at the university. Furthermore, the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University is one of the programs providing exchange opportunities between students coming from different cultures.

Prof. Mihaly Simai, one of the founders of ACUNS and currently member of the Institute for World Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Corvinus University, talked about one international NGO, the World Federation of the United Nations Association - the oldest organization dealing with the UN system and the main organization for advocacy of the UN until now. It has 112 members and organizes regional activities dealing with issues of the UN and specific regional problems. In Hungary there are now 72 universities, and in every one of them there is teaching about the activity of the UN. The professors teaching about the UN are all United Nations Association members. Through their membership their experiences can be brought into the association, but vice versa the association can also help professors to address UN issues that are relevant in the given area. Another very important activity is to help the Hungarian public to learn more about the UN system, because the specialized

agencies are really important for the functioning of the present global system. The UNA is organizing a workshop every year on the presentation of the flagship publication of a given specialized agency. The UNA is also encouraging students to write their diplomas on issues concerning the UN and to use UN-material.

Dr. Lehmanova Zuzana, Director of Jan Masaryk Center of International Studies in Prague, which was founded in 1991 as an interdisciplinary academic center explained that the center developed various Master and PhD programs. The center started to become a member of international networks, first with APSEA and the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna and later with ACUNS. Also, the Czech United Nations Association was founded by Jan Masaryk, therefore, it was logical for the Masaryk Center to also work together with UNA. All these networks are very useful for academics in Central and Eastern Europe. UNA is now a global network and a very useful platform, because it offers a journal and invites young researchers from Central and Eastern Europe to publish their work. Dr. Lehmanva also mentioned that the 15th Young Scholars' Conference will be taking place in Prague, which is also producing a publication of all the research papers presented by the PhD students at the conference.

The presentations were followed by an intervention by Dr. Donocek, former UNIDO official, who wanted to point out that, from his point of view, the erosion of the role of the UN is due to: (1) solving global problems within a restricted framework, G8 or G20 plus. There is not a lack of issues, but the question is rather that these issues are being discussed in the UN General Assembly, but the decision making process is happening in a smaller circle; (2) incapability to provide answers to the new issues that emerge. Mr. Alcorta replied to the address by clarifying some of the points made during his intervention: in his view, the UN lacks visibility not because of the mere absence of issues on its agenda but because of the absence of issues of global reach that would also touch the hearts of the individuals.

At the end of the debate, Prof. Jönsson stated that conferences like the present one prove that the UN is adapting to the emergence of new actors (non-state actors) and that it wants to facilitate such conferences and knowledge-sharing to bring more visibility to the UN.