

The UN at 75: Europe's vision for the world organization by Blanca Trepát

On the 3rd of March 2020, "the UN at 75: Europe's vision for the world organization" took place at the Representation of the North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) to the EU in commemoration of the UN75th anniversary. The conference was organized by the Development and Peace Foundation with the support of the Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability and the Minister for Federal, European and International Affairs of the State of NRW.

The conference was introduced by Hans Stein, Director of the Representation of NRW and brought together experts on the relationships UN-EU such as Anna Luise Chané, Research Fellow at Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies at KU Leuven; Dr. Jibecke Joensson, Policy officer on multilateral relations focusing on the EU-UN partnership on peace and security European External Action Service (EEAS); Hilde F. Johnson Former Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for UNMISS South Sudan Senior Advisor, European Institute of Peace and Dr. Georgios Kostakos, Executive Director of the Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability (FOGGS).

The first words were on multilateralism, currently endangered and threatened by resurgent nationalism. UN's 75th anniversary presents the right moment to revitalize multilateral principles. In order to tackle this, the EU's role in supporting the UN's revival is crucial. Indeed, 35% of the funding for the UN systems comes from the EU. On the other hand, some countries are reducing or withdrawing their contributions. This situation only worsens dependency on the interests of individual member states. Without an increase of international organizations' core funding, their autonomy and role as multilateralism catalyst will be very limited. Hilde F. Johnson mentioned during the panel discussion that in order to trigger a UN reform, a proper financing mechanism should be developed together with new ways of fundraising to overcome the current funding gap. Without that financing mechanism and Member States not paying their debts, it is almost impossible to reach a reform. Nevertheless, Dr. Jibecke Joensson called against one member state or group of countries filling that funding gap as it could threaten the impartiality of the institution.



On the role of the European Union in reaching a UN restoration, it was pointed out that EU is currently facing its own challenges as well. Member States are progressively acting out of the bloc. EU is nowadays facing fragmentation challenges and it needs to be strengthened before it can help restore the UN. How can the EU help to legitimize the UN again? This was one of the questions from the public.

The panel emphasized on the need for the EU to act more on cross regionally strategies and coalitions in order to grow stronger.

For the EU to contribute addressing the UN, it should protect the set of norms provided by the UN institutions by creating alliances with other countries and regions. Every country should realize about the benefits of global norms.

In addition to that, Dr. Joensson underlined the fact that the EU had lost a member of the UN Security Council after Brexit. However, she noted the will of UK to continue working with its European partners in that sense. UNSC underrepresentation was also topic of discussion, especially the fact that regions like Latin America and Africa are not even represented.

Throughout the conference, speakers noted the need for civil society to have a role in policy implementation or monitoring. Their engagement is key if multilateralism is to be future-fit. Anna Luise Chané mentioned that the EU used to face similar challenges to those of the United Nations in terms of citizen's lack of involvement and representation. Now, the EU has developed its own methods to take citizens' needs into account such as the European Citizen Initiative or the direct election of members of the European Parliament. Likewise, it is important for the UN to reconnect with its citizens and develop its own tools.

The discussion concluded with the need to find a purpose to united people behind the UN. There is no connection anymore with its initial purpose: World War II. Therefore, a new "global narrative of hope" should be put into place by governments and nations at all levels and allow the UN to become a reference body for everyone. The protection of human beings should be made collectively, and not by states on their own.