

EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

Welcome to the first 2019 issue of our journal *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Studia Territorialia*. This thematic issue consists of three contributions we received in response to our call for papers entitled “International Organizations throughout the 20th and 21st Centuries: Successes, Failures, Transformations, and Challenges,” which we launched in autumn 2018.

The primary motivation for choosing this theme is the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the League of Nations and its associated bodies, an occasion that invites historians and social scientists alike to reflect on the origin of the contemporary system of international organizations, its transformation over the past hundred years, and the various challenges it faces today.

The relevance of our invitation is found in recent theoretical and methodological advances in the study of the history of international organizations. As historical studies have adopted a transnational perspective in the early twenty-first century, historians have begun to use international organizations as lenses through which to examine global phenomena, actors and interactions on the international, national and local levels. Relying on sources produced by the organizations themselves, contemporary researchers focus on studying how they have facilitated the circulation and internationalization of knowledge and expertise produced by individuals and international networks. Scholars first applied this approach to the study of the history of international organizations in the interwar years. More recently, the Second World War and the post-war periods after both World Wars have become the focus of a growing number of studies.

Our thematic issue takes part in this transnational research dynamic. It offers a condensed review of some of the important trends in the contemporary study of international organizations from a transnational historical perspective, in all their richness and diversity. In fact, each contribution illustrates a distinct

approach to the study of history of international organizations, one of three important research paradigms in this field of inquiry. Frederick Cowell analyzes the history of the UN Commission on Human Rights. He presents a rather classical IR macro-study that focuses on the internal mechanisms and dynamics of a global organization that was important in the context of a changing world order and de-colonization. For her part, Anna Novikov clearly demonstrates the link between the international and national arenas. She carefully documents the sometimes clumsy and intrusive attempts of the League of Nations to mediate and manage conflicts in the ethnically-mixed region of Eastern Upper Silesia. Finally, Carolin Liebisch-Gümüş exemplifies the latest innovations in transnational historiography, which are uncovering surprising influence by international organizations at the national level. Her study of the internationalization of Turkey's foreign policy in the 1920s chronicles seemingly paradoxical links between the enthusiastic approach of the Kemalists to internationalism, which was manifested in their efforts to enter the League of Nations, and their radical essentialist, nationalist, and anti-individualist political rhetoric.

Despite their different thematic and methodological preferences, all three studies share at least three common characteristics that put them at the very core of contemporary scholarship of the transnational history of international organizations. First, each article stands out for its use of a rich array of various types of sources. Besides the standard recourse to official communiqués and resolutions by international organizations' own decision making bodies, which is most prominent in Frederick Cowell's paper, all the authors document the importance and the advantages of utilizing many different sources on many different levels. While Anna Novikov draws heavily on Polish local and national archives and press reporting, Carolin Liebisch-Gümüş illustrates the benefits of plunging deeply into the private papers and correspondence of the important officials who mediated relations between Istanbul and Geneva.

This leads us directly to the second common feature of the texts in this thematic issue: the transnational career trajectories of the influential actors of that time. These actors are today mostly unknown outside of specialist circles, yet at various moments they played a fundamental role in mediating between international organizations and national and local actors. In doing so, they made an important contribution to the political and social relevance and to the legitimacy of international organizations, which were striving for recognition in the interwar period. In this regard, Anna Novikov invites us in her paper to observe the surprising career and sudden rise to influence of Walter Maurer. Maurer was a Swiss school inspector who was sent by the League of Nations to personally

examine the German-language proficiency of children registering in minority schools in the Silesian Voivodeship in the early 1920s. His mission was to support the decision-making process of the Mixed Commission, which was headed by another Swiss newcomer to Silesia, Felix Calonder. In the same way, Carolin Liebisch-Gümüş contributes to making the history of international relations more tangible and more personal by introducing us leading Turkish thinkers and public figures with transnational backgrounds, such as Ziya Gökalp and Tevfik Rüştü Aras.

Last but not least, all three articles concur that various peripheral regions and border zones offer a particularly fruitful entrance point into the study of the history of international organizations from a transnational perspective. Frederick Cowell persuasively shows how after 1960, the newly independent states of Africa and Asia instrumentalized the UN Commission on Human Rights under the banner of their anti-apartheid campaign, at the same time as they were attempting to overcome their peripheral position in the international system. The other two articles provide evidence that the Eastern and Southern peripheries of Europe constituted sites of lively intellectual debate in the inter-war period on the role of international organizations and the meaning of internationalism. Furthermore, the peripheral European states were experimental laboratories for pioneering the work of international organizations, especially in ethnically mixed areas.

We hope that you appreciate our new issue!

Ondřej Matějka, on behalf of the editorial team
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