

## Conference Report

***The League of Nations: The First Global Peacekeeping Organisation in the Changing World – Interdependencies and Reflections*** took place on 3 and 4 November at Villa Lanna in Prague 6

The conference, held under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, was organised by the Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the Institute of World History at Faculty of Arts of Charles University, the Institute of East European History of the University of Vienna, and the National Archives of the Czech Republic. The conference was part of the important AV21 Strategy programme: *Resilient Society for the 21st Century; Potential of Crisis and Effective Transformation*, which is coordinated by the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences under the leadership of doc. RNDr., Mgr. Alice Koubová, Ph.D. The programme comprises 11 departments of the Academy of Sciences and several other cooperating institutions. The programme is also supported by the Rector's Office of Charles University through the CENTRAL and CO-OPERATIO projects.

The aim of the conference was to present the issues of the League of Nations through a considerable number of diverse contributions of the conference participants. In particular, it focused on the question as to what

the League of Nations can present to today's society based on the two decades of its work and activities. Today's world, which is facing an increasing number of conflicts, especially on the European scale, in the Eastern part of Europe, as well as socio-economic, climatic and – in recent years – the coronavirus pandemic, could find inspiration and learn from the experience of the League of Nations in the inter-war period.

The conference brought together dozens of experts on the subject and the period in question from many European countries as well as from the United States. Based on the thematic focus of the individual contributors, the conference was divided into nine panels, during which more than thirty papers were presented. On the first day of the conference, the panels were held simultaneously in the Apollon and Adalbert halls at Villa Lanny. Remote access was set up for foreign participants who were not able to come to Prague in person, hence the conference was also held in a hybrid format.

As such, the conference opened with a few introductory words and forewords on the topic. The first keynote

speaker was Erik Goldstein (Boston University), who addressed the relationship between the UK and the League of Nations, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the organisation as a whole. Next to speak was Doru Gheorghe Liciu (Head of Diplomatic Archives, Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) who gave a presentation on Nicolae Titulescu and his work within the League of Nations, with particular emphasis on the importance of peace and international relations within the rule of law. The last presentation of the opening part of the conference was given by Jindřich Dejmeš (Historical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences), focusing on Edvard Beneš and his views on the League of Nations, especially its shortcomings.

The first panel of the conference, subtitled *Headquarters, Functioning and Reform Efforts*, featured presentations by experts from universities and institutions in Austria, Croatia, Poland and Switzerland. Václav Horčíčka from Charles University moderated the panel and the discussion that followed. Clara Egger from the University of Vienna addressed the panel primarily on the issue of the women's peace movement as well as the impact of this movement on the League of Nations. Dariusz Jeziorny from the University of Łódź focused on the perceived need for reform of the League of Nations within Polish foreign policy. Other contributors to this panel were Daniel Quiroga-Villamarin on the topic of the gradual transformation of Geneva into the international headquarters of the

League of Nations, and Hrvoje Čapo from the Croatian Institute of History presented a paper on Aristide Briand and his projects within the League of Nations.

Experts from Hungary, Italy, Turkey, and the Czech Republic attended the second panel on *International Security and Global Problems*, moderated by Hermann Joseph Hiery from the University of Bayreuth. Presentations were given, for example, by Krisztián Ben, an expert from the University of Pécs, on the approach of the League of Nations to the issue of Armenians in the French Mandate Territories, Syria and Lebanon, as well as by Göktug Ipek from Istanbul University on the relations between the League of Nations and Turkey. Also on this panel, Federica Guazzini from the Università per Stranieri di Perugia outlined the issue of African states that were active in dealing with refugees in the Commonwealth of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s. She also highlighted how only a few African countries were part of the League of Nations and how their importance is often overlooked in historical studies during the aforementioned period. The second panel also included a presentation by Jaroslav Valkoun from Charles University on the attitude of Great Britain and its dominions towards Japanese policy within the League of Nations in the early 1930s.

The third panel on *European Countries and Minority Problems*, moderated by Hans-Christof Kraus from the University of Passau, featured experts from France, Hungary and the Czech

Republic. The two experts from the Czech Republic, Václav Horčíčka from Charles University and Lukáš Novotný from the University of West Bohemia, both chose as the topic of their contribution the relations between Czechoslovak and German citizens during the First Republic. While Lukáš Novotný dealt with the issue of the German minorities in Czechoslovakia and the petition they submitted to the League of Nations in the 1920s, Václav Horčíčka focused on the issue of the Land Reform, especially the settlement with German landowners in Czechoslovakia during the First Republic. Csilla Dömök from the University of Pécs and Roser Cussó from the Sorbonne in Paris discussed the approach of the League of Nations to the protection of minorities.

Within the fourth panel, *The League of Nations and Civil Society*, we can mention the contribution of Polish expert Jerzy Gaul from the Central Archives of Historical Records dealing with the problem of collective security and the person of Joseph Pilsudski or the contribution of the Romanian expert Andrei-Dumitru Olteanu from Babes-Bolyai University who focused on Romanian diplomatic support for peacekeeping between 1932 and 1935.

The last panel of the first day focused on the *Interwar Society and its Interdependencies*. The panel included experts from the Czech Republic, such as Emil Voráček from the Historical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences and David Hubený from the National Archives. The foreign experts included Omer Aloni from the Peres Academic

Center in Israel with a presentation on Ecology or the relation of the League of Nations to the new ecological order. Hermann Hiery gave a talk on the issue of the Saar under the control of the League of Nations.

The second day of the conference opened with the sixth panel entitled *European Territorial Disputes*. Dariusz Jeziorny was the moderator of this panel. Among the experts who presented their contributions at the panel were Andrej Tóth from the University of Economics, Inxhi Brisku from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore in Bulgaria and Anna Rozsypal Pajerová from Charles University. These speakers focused on different regions of Europe and their relationship to the League of Nations. Andrej Tóth devoted his contribution to the issue of Hungary and its complicated path among the members of the League of Nations. Anna Rozsypal Pajerová focused on the Scandinavian region, presenting the issue of the dispute between Finland and Sweden over the Åland Islands, especially in the context of the League of Nations arbitration. Inxhi Brisku also focused on a conflict, this time between Greece and Albania in the 1920s, and then especially on the role of the League of Nations as a mediator in resolving the problem.

The seventh panel addressed the question of *Politicians, Reformers, Visionaries*. Moderated by Frank Hadler, this panel featured Wojciech Engelking from the University of Warsaw, who contributed a piece on Carl Schmitt's criticism of the League of Nations. Next, Markus Beham from the Uni-

versity of Passau presented his paper on the person of Heinrich Lammasch, and the last speaker on the panel was Marilena Papadaki from the Open University of Greece. The eighth panel – *Criticism, Dissatisfactions and Controversies?* – was moderated by Marija Wakounig from the University of Vienna. The eighth panel featured presentations by Hans-Christof Kraus from the University of Passau on the German critique of the mandate system and Rupert Quaderer from the Liechtenstein-Institut with a presentation on Liechtenstein and the Society of Nations. Miroslav Šepták from the University of South Bohemia also presented his contribution.

The last panel was moderated by Erik Goldstein and focused on *Reflections and Contradictions*. Here, we can mention the contributions of Vít Sme-

tana from the Institute for Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences who discussed the experience of Czechoslovak politicians with the League of Nations as well as Gabriel Zvinc from Romania, who presented the question of how the experience of the League of Nations was used for the UN and peacekeeping efforts. Thanks to its scope and the variety of contributions, this two-day conference proved that it can truly be considered an international gathering of experts on the subject. The contributions themselves, but also the discussions that took place within each panel afterwards, provided many new ideas for further research and the search for new topics in the period under review.

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