

Expert Opinion**by Dr. Ronny Patz,***Lecturer at the Hertie School (Berlin)**in replacement of the Professorship for International Political Economy*

for the public hearing of the subcommittee

"United Nations, International Organisations and Globalisation"

of the German Bundestag

on the theme "The United Nations at 75"

on October 7th 2020, 3-5 pm

The conclusions presented in this expert opinion are the result of more than six years of research and cooperation within the framework of the DFG Research Unit "International Public Administration" (<http://ipa-research.com>). The conclusions are derived in particular from publications that have been produced in the context of the DFG-funded research by Dr. Ronny Patz and colleagues on budget management and resource mobilisation processes in the UN system:

- Patz, Ronny; Goetz, Klaus H. (2019). [*Managing Money and Discord in the UN. Budgeting and Bureaucracy*](#). Oxford University Press.
- Thorvaldsdottir, Svanhildur; Patz, Ronny (in publication). Mandate or Donors? Explaining UNHCR's country-level expenditures from 1967-2016. *Political Studies*.
- Patz, Ronny; Thorvaldsdottir, Svanhildur (2020). [*Drivers of Expenditure Allocation in the IOM: Refugees, Donors, and International Bureaucracy*](#). In: Geiger, Martin; Pécoud, Antoine (Hrsg.). *The International Organization for Migration: The New 'UN Migration Agency' in Critical Perspective*. 75-98.
- Hübner, Klaus; Patz, Ronny (2019). [*Deutschlands Finanzbeiträge zum UN-System zwischen 2008 und 2018*](#). *Vereinte Nationen* 67(6), 262-266.
- Eckhard, Steffen; Patz, Ronny; Schmidt, Sylvia (2018). [*Reform efforts, synchronization failure, and international bureaucracy: The case of the UNESCO budget crisis*](#). *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26(11), 1639-1656.
- Patz, Ronny; Goetz, Klaus H. (2017). [*Changing budgeting administration in international organizations: budgetary pressures, complex principals and administrative leadership*](#), in Knill, Christoph; Bauer, Michael; Eckhard, Steffen (eds.) *International Bureaucracies: Challenges and Lessons for Public Administration Research*. Palgrave Macmillan, 123-150.
- Goetz, Klaus H.; Patz, Ronny (Hrsg.) (2017). Resourcing International Organizations. Special Issue of the journal *Global Policy* (Free Access): <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gpol.2017.8.issue-S5/issuetoc>.

The expert opinion summarises key findings arising directly and indirectly from this research and the publications. The analysis reflects Dr Patz' views and does not represent the perspective of Hertie School or Dr Patz' co-authors. Selected sources for key statements are shown in endnotes. A comprehensive literature review is not provided.

For further enquires, please contact Dr. Patz at patz@hertie-school.org or on Twitter [@ronpatz](https://twitter.com/ronpatz)

Speaking notes for the opening statement of Dr. Ronny Patz

(spoken word may differ from the text)

Mr Chairman, Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to draw **four key lessons from the research on the United Nations** as a system of fragmented global governance in response to the questionⁱ you addressed to us as speakers, and would also like to formulate some conclusions.

These are based on a wide range of insights gathered by fellow academics from various disciplines, both national and international. The lessons and conclusions are somewhat sharpened for the context of this hearing. Central sources for my statements today can be found in the written statement.

My own research over the past six years has focused in particular on the **budgeting and financing of the UN system**, as well as on the **role of UN administrations in fundraising** and in the organisation of **budgetary and reform processes**.ⁱⁱ

I would like to highlight that when I speak of the "United Nations" I am referring primarily to the **UN system as a whole**.ⁱⁱⁱ This system is a historically grown, increasingly fragmented network of several dozen international organisations, intergovernmental negotiating arenas, expert bodies, military and non-military operations, funding mechanisms and a multitude of international administrative bodies. These are partially or fully independent but often intertwined in legal, financial and/or personnel terms.

Links between the parts of the UN system exist at the global, regional and national levels as well as "in the field". These links are often more pronounced within policy domains, for example in the area of "global health". These multi-level networks of the UN system have evolved since the early days of the UN, and some of them have existed for a longer period of time.^{iv}

It is not without reason that UN Secretary-General António Guterres uses the term "**networked multilateralism**" in his recent speeches.^v

The first lesson for this expert opinion is therefore that after 75 years, the United Nations can only be understood if it is studied as an a system that has evolved organically and that is diplomatically and administratively interconnected.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from this insight is that any attempt to change one part of the UN system always has an impact on other parts. Many failures of individual UN organisations are therefore systemic in nature and have little to do with individual organisational failures. You should keep this in mind as a policy makers in your assessment of the UN's work.

In some regards, one even has to go back to the League of Nations to understand some of the current structures and processes in the UN system, i.e. those processes that you might want to see reformed.

This brings me to the second lesson from academic research of recent years: The United Nations is not just 75 years old. Central elements of the system, and also their connections with each other, are up to 100 years old or even older.

In particular **organisationally and administratively**, the UN was shaped by the **League of Nations**. In the case of the technical UN agencies (such as ITU, UPU or WIPO), **some structures date back to the 19th century**.

The current budgetary process for the UN core budget, for example, is in essence still the same as it was in the League of Nations - and similarly complicated.^{vi} As early as the 1920s, the League of Nations Health Organisation (LNHO) was financially dependent on private philanthropists from the USA for its activities, just as the WHO is again today.^{vii} In the context of the League of Nations, network structures of "intellectual cooperation" paved the way for the later UNESCO.^{viii} And even the Nansen International Office for Refugees already had organisational structures which later were reproduced in UNHCR.^{ix}

This brings me to a somewhat uncomfortable **conclusion** for you as politicians: from a scientific point of view, many of today's reform efforts in the UN system are doomed to failure because they encounter long-standing path dependencies as well as stable and complex interests constellations.^x There is thus also a **joint decision trap** at the United Nations.

Yet, to rephrase this conclusion in a more positive manner: UN reforms require above all **synchronised efforts by a large majority of states with the involvement of the UN bureaucracies concerned** in order to change established UN structures. *Minilateralism* in the shape of small and exclusive reform initiatives does not suffice.

These remarks bring me to the third lesson: Fragmentation and thus ultimately bureaucratisation in the UN system are often the result of well-meaning minilateral proposal^{xi} through which national politicians bring their own political hobby-horses into the UN rather than attempting to seek difficult compromises in the arenas of global multilateralism.

One reason for this is that in particular the countries of the Global North, i.e. the most important contributors to the UN system, have not yet come to terms with the fact that a post-colonial global multilateralism means that the countries of the Global South (partly represented by the G77) make up the majority of states in the world. Many of these countries have a colonial history and therefore look to the United Nations with certain expectations. But instead of seeking compromises that represent these majorities, Western donors prefer

to finance special minilateral programmes, subsidiary institutions, multi-donor trust funds and other press-effective flagship projects, often through tightly earmarked funds.^{xii}

The **conclusion** to be drawn from this is that the future of the United Nations also depends on whether, and when, these minilateral reflexes will end. Until that stage, the Global South—the majority of states—and the Global North—the funding majority—will be facing each other in the UN without being willing or able to drive reforms.^{xiii}

The good news in all of this, and this is the fourth lesson: While the state-based global multilateralism seems to have arrived at various dead ends, most UN administrations are nevertheless continuing to do their job.^{xiv}

They use their autonomy to shape global policy making and to find or advance solutions to pressing issues such as climate change, forced migration and displacement, or global pandemics.

These administrations are the ones who have to translate pathological behaviour of states with often contradictory views into meaningful global action.^{xv}

They continue to deliver even when states regularly send contradictory signals in multilateral fora or through earmarked funding incentives. They do so in Geneva and New York as well as in Yarmouk in Syria or in the Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Perhaps - and this is my provocative final conclusion - UN member states, and notably the major donors, should simply let UN administrations do their job. This would perhaps help the UN at 75 more than to interfere with excessive collective micro-management or to further contribute to the UN system fragmentation through new minilateral initiatives.

I thank you for your attention!

Endnotes (alle Links vom 5. Oktober 2020)

ⁱ Question to the experts: “What insights do you draw from the past 75 years of the United Nations and which conclusions result from these insights to better prepare the global organization for its future?”

ⁱⁱ See references to the expert’s publication on page one of the written statement.

ⁱⁱⁱ Organisational chart of the UN system as of July 2019: https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/18-00159e_un_system_chart_17x11_4c_en_web.pdf; definition of the UN system by UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination: <https://www.unsceb.org/content/un-system>.

^{iv} Akami, Tomoko. (2017). Imperial politics, intercolonialism, and the shaping of global governing norms: public health expert networks in Asia and the League of Nations Health Organization, 1908-37. *Journal of Global History* 12(1), 4-25.

^v “Message on the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace”, 24 April 2020, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2020/April/the-secretary-generals-message-on-the-international-day-of-multilateralism-and-diplomacy-for-peace.html>.

^{vi} see for example the chapter, “The Historical Origins of UN System Budgeting” in Patz, Ronny; Goetz, Klaus H. (2019). *Managing Money and Discord in the UN. Budgeting and Bureaucracy*. Oxford University Press. <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198838333.001.0001/oso-9780198838333-chapter-3>.

^{vii} Seitz, Karolin; Martens, Jens (2017). Philanthrolateralism: private funding and corporate influence in the United Nations. *Global Policy* 8(5), 46-50.

^{viii} Grandjean, Martin (2018). *Les réseaux de la coopération intellectuelle. La Société des Nations comme actrice des échanges scientifiques et culturels dans l’entre-deux-guerres*. Doktorarbeit, Universität de Lausanne, Faculté des lettres.

^{ix} Skran, Claudena M. (1992). The international refugee regime: the historical and contemporary context of international responses to asylum problems. *Journal of Policy History* 4(1), 8-35.

^x Hanrieder, Tine (2015). *International organization in time: fragmentation and reform*. Oxford University Press..

^{xi} Jankauskas, Vytautas; Patz, Ronny (2019). How Well-meaning Donors Create the UN Machinery They Don’t Like. <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/09/27/how-well-meaning-donors-create-the-un-machinery-they-dont-like/>

^{xii} Recent research on earmarking show that not only does this practice result in fragmentation of the UN system but also that it results in significant bureaucratic costs for donor country administrations while presenting themselves as incoherent vis-à-vis UN agencies. Cf.: Weinlich, Silke; Baumann, Max-Otto; Lundsgaarde, Erik (2020). Germany’s Funding to the UNDS: Towards a Better Mix for a Stronger Multilateralism. Quelle: <https://www.die-gdi.de/briefing-paper/article/germanys-funding-to-the-unds-towards-a-better-mix-for-stronger-multilateralism/>

^{xiii} Baumann, Max-Otto (2018). Forever North–South? The political challenges of reforming the UN development system. *Third World Quarterly* 39(4), 626-641.

^{xiv} UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner described this in a recent interview on the responses to COVID19 in the UN system: <https://www.devex.com/news/covid-19-response-a-tale-of-two-uns-undp-chief-says-98152>.

^{xv} Research on international bureaucracies first assumed that it is the public administrations that are pathological as such (Barnett, Michael; Finnemore, Martha (2004). *Rules for the world: International organizations in global politics*. Cornell University Press). However, research on “International Public Administration” (see for example <http://ipa-research.com/publications/>), including my own (e.g. Patz & Goetz 2019) show that most pathological behaviour of UN organisations are rather the response to states acting as “complex principals” than emerging endogenously out of international bureaucracies.