

International Law as a Profession
5th Research Forum of the European Society of International Law
Amsterdam, 23-25 May 2013

The 5th Research Forum of the European Society of International Law (ESIL), titled 'International Law as a Profession', took place in Amsterdam from 23 to 25 May 2013. The Forum was organized jointly by the Amsterdam Center for International Law (ACIL) of the University of Amsterdam (UvA), and the Department of Transnational Legal Studies, VU University Amsterdam (VU), in close collaboration with the Executive Board of the ESIL.

The idea behind the Research Forum was that international law should not only be understood as a system of rules and doctrines, but also in terms of social and professional practices. The aim of the Forum was to allow the professional community to gain new insights on how to address the new challenges facing international law in the globalized environment of the second decade of the 21st century. The Forum attracted about 300 scholars, judges, legal advisors and practitioners.

On 23 May, the Research Forum was officially opened with speeches delivered by Laurence Boisson de Chazournes (Université de Genève, President of ESIL), Elies van Sliedregt (Dean, Faculty of Law, VU) and André Nollkaemper (UvA, Chair of the Organizing Committee). After that, the opening ceremony featured keynote addresses by Andreas Paulus (German Constitutional Court) and Anne Orford (University of Melbourne), followed by a debate between them that was moderated by Jean d'Aspremont (University of Manchester and UvA). The speeches and discussion introduced the audience to some of the main topics of the Forum, including the history of international law as academic discipline, the interaction between professionals and academics, and the moral responsibilities of researchers in international law. The opening ceremony was recorded and made available online on the Research Forum's website.

On 24 and 25 May, the Research Forum offered four semi-plenary sessions and fifteen panels. The semi-plenaries were organized around the following themes: International Lawyers' Oscillations of Roles, International Law as Discipline, Research as Profession, and Practicing International Law in the 21st Century. The fifteen panels addressed a range of topics: The International Lawyer as Legal Adviser, The International Lawyer as Peacemaker (Part I), The Identity of International Law, The International Lawyer as Legal Counsel, Les Professions du Ius in Bello, The Turn to Biography in International Law, The Aristocracies of International Law and Democratic Narratives: Tensions and Ambiguities, The International Lawyer as Scholar, The Dynamics of International Judicial Law-Making, International Law as a Practice, The International Lawyer as Peacemaker (Part II), The International Lawyer as Judge or Arbitrator, The International Lawyer in the Domestic Legal Order, Regulating Defence Counsel before International Criminal Tribunals, and The International Environmental Lawyers Situated between Natural Scientific Knowledge and Economic Constraints. The papers presented at the panels were selected on the basis of a call for papers with the assistance of four senior external peer-reviewers. The authors of the accepted papers received personal feedback on the abstracts as well as the papers. In addition, the organizing committee contacted all moderators prior to the event in order to ensure the quality and coherence of all sessions.

Both the semi-plenaries and the panels witnessed exchanges on international law and its professions from refreshing and innovative perspectives. Whilst the differences of the specific prejudices, approaches, understandings, and agendas of each profession were highlighted, some underexplored parallels and similarities also came into the limelight. For instance, on several occasions it was discussed to which extent scholarly and professional disagreements are not only a source of pluralism, but also play a constitutive and unifying role in the identity of the community of international lawyers. It appeared that participants shared a common understanding of the importance of the role (and the related responsibilities) of international lawyers as well as of the dialogue amongst them in the evolution and limits of international law and its adaptation to the changing social, political and economic values and interests.

During the closing session, Ingo Venzke (UvA), Veronika Bílková (Charles University, Prague) and Makane Mbengue (Université de Genève) discussed the outcome of the papers presented, whereas Pierre d'Argent (Université de Louvain) offered some concluding general reflections. Finally, Wouter Werner (VU), drawing on the exchanges heard during the Research Forum, formally closed the Forum by sharing his views on the possible research agenda (and the implication thereof) beyond the Forum.

During and preceding the Research Forum, a few additional events took place, including the meetings and workshops of several ESIL Interest Groups, and the meeting of the editors of international law journals.

The Research Forum was very successful, above all thanks to the large number and variety of participants. The various themes presented and discussed during the opening ceremony, the semi-plenaries and the panels, as well as during the informal breaks, lunches and the gala dinner, triggered a lively exchange of views and perspectives and will stimulate further discussion and research into the Forum's theme. Some of the papers presented at the Research Forum have been included in the ESIL SSRN paper series, whilst a selection of them will be collected in an edited volume specifically dedicated to the theme of the Forum that will be published by a renowned publisher in 2014.

The Research Forum took place on various historical locations in the heart of Amsterdam, which also contributed to the great success of the Forum. The opening ceremony was held at the Aula of the UvA, a church from 1633, nowadays used for religious celebrations and concerts as well as lectures and ceremonies of the UvA. The Forum took place at Felix Meritis, an impressive canal building built in 1788 which owns the oldest concert hall of the Netherlands. The gala dinner was held at the magnificent Koepelkerk, a former church dating from 1671, which still retains its original charm. Furthermore, a boat tour preceded the dinner, passing along Amsterdam's famous and picturesque canals.

Another important feature contributing to the success of the Research Forum was the launch of the mobile application. The app, which was consulted by over 200 attendees, allowed participants to access the latest information and to interact with each other through tweets. The Forum's website further provided useful information and online access to the papers.

The organizing committee for the Research Forum was composed of André Nollkaemper (Professor of Public International Law, UvA, Vice President of ESIL), Jean d'Aspremont (Professor of International Law, University of Manchester and UvA), Wouter Werner, (Professor of Public International Law, VU), Tarcisio Gazzini (Associate Professor International Law, VU), Anniek van der Schuijt (VU) and Martine van Trigt (UvA). The organizing committee also received the invaluable support of Rok Jarnik.

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