

# 2015/16 RAUN PRAGUE SESSION Report

28th - 30th April 2015







#### Introduction

After a successful closing of the third academic year in Vienna in January this year, it was time again to introduce new future internationalists to the Regional Academy on the United Nations (RAUN). After a careful selection of the new participants and a comprehensive preparation phase, the RAUN kicked off its fourth year on 27 April 2015, with the first session traditionally held in Prague, Czech Republic.

Young scholars from Austrian, Czech, Hungarian, Serbian and Slovakian universities joined the Regional Academy. Altogether, 43 participants from more than 12 nations and their coordinators spent three days in Prague. In addition to new students, RAUN welcomed two new research counsels this year; Professor Katharine Sarikakis of the University of Vienna and Professor Lucia Mokra from the Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia.

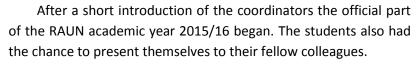
This year the Prague session focused on multilateral diplomacy, international development and cooperation. The students were given lectures and presentations by officials from UNDP, UNIS, and humanitarian NGOs. Also officials from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Austrian and Hungarian embassies interacted with students about their engagements in the UN system. As a very important feature of every first session of the academic year, the participants had the opportunity to get to know each other during formal as well as informal activities. They were also divided into research groups with specific research topics and already had the chance to coordinate their research projects.

Preparations for the second session, which will be held this year in Szeged, Hungary in September 2015 are already underway. The third year of RAUN will conclude during the ACUNS Vienna Annual conference at the UN in Vienna in January 2016.

# The Programme of the session

### Tuesday, 28th April 2015

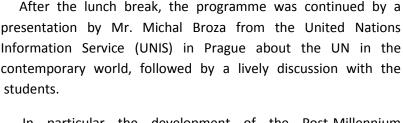




To introduce the recent students to further possibilities within the RAUN community, the Alumni Network was presented. In particular the Peer+ (Peer Review and Peer Tutoring) was presented to the students as an additional assistance for their upcoming research projects and an opportunity to remain engaged with RAUN after they graduation.



Following that, the research topics were presented and distributed within the students to create international and transdisciplinary research groups.





In particular the development of the Post-Millennium Development Goals in a rapidly changing world raised interest within the students. Mr. Broza stressed that, despite challenges it faces, the UN remains the only forum to solve major security and development problems in the world today. It became quite clear that there are no simple solutions for the challenges of climate change, maternal mortality, inequality or among others peace and security.



One of his key messages to the participants was the need of young, global minded people to tackle nowadays challenges and find adequate solutions for them. Therefore he stressed the importance of the youth within the context of development.

The first day of the Prague Sessions concluded with an official welcoming reception at the University of Economics in Prague where Professor Zuzana Lehmannova, president of the Czech United Nations Association, greeted and welcomed the students.







## Wednesday, 29th April 2015

On Wednesday the Regional Academy had once again the honour to be invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic in the Czernin Palace.

Under the title 'The Czech Republic and the UN family', high-ranking officials of the Foreign Ministry presented the priorities of the Czech Republic regarding the United Nations such as the reform of the Security Council and a more transparent election process of future UN Secretary Generals, disarmament and non-proliferation as well as human rights. The Czech Republic also hopes to intensify its involvement within peacekeeping operations and to increase the numbers of staff involved.

The students had the chance to ask questions to the representatives of the different departments, in particular regarding the cooperation of the Czech Republic with other countries of the region. All of the officials agreed upon the importance of the UN as a forum where issues can be discussed universally.

Afterwards the students were provided with a guided tour though the Czernin Palace with its interesting history and magnificent and representative halls and rooms.

The visit to the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs was followed by walk down to the city center where students enjoyed a fantastic weather with a nice picnic next to the Moldova during the lunch break before heading back to the University of Economics.

The afternoon session began with a presentation on the 'Community-led local development as a tool of development policy' by Radim Srsen, Associate Professor at the University of Economics in Prague, coordinator for the RAUN in the Czech Republic and member of the ELARD (European LEADER Association for Rural Development) for the Czech Republic. In his presentation he explained the specific approach of this form of development on a local level. The aim of this approach is to give the rural people access and to mobilize them to shape their own future. Crucial features of that are the public – private partnership, the de-centralised administration as well as the bottom-up approach as central pillars. He also showed successful case studies in Europe and in Africa, in particular in Mozambique, to demonstrate the universal application of this approach. The topic was very positively received by the participants and led to a lively

discussion with many comments and questions.

Afterwards, Mr. Martin Gärtner, Deputy Head of Mission, Austrian Embassy in Prague and Mr. Miklós Márvánthe, Third Secretary of the Hungarian Embassy in Prague, welcomed the students to a roundtable discussion in which multilateral cooperation in Central Europe was debated. Both of them confirmed, that bilateral relations between their home countries and the Czech Republic are still very important, despite a growing regional integration through the European Union or the Visegrad group. The students also had the opportunity to ask questions about the professional work and the personal benefits and challenges of the diplomatic service.



The last session of Wednesday was held by Mr. Jan Stepan on "Neutrality of NGOs: Experience from Afghanistan". Mr Stepan himself worked several years with the Czech NGO "People in Need" in Afghanistan. He talked about his time in Afghanistan and about the challenges he faced while working with an independent NGO in a quite difficult working environment. He also pointed out the difference between the work of an independent NGO and the work of the UN in the field.



Having a business background himself, Mr. Stepan stressed the need for an entrepreneurial and business mind set in development work. He also emphasized the important role of women to balance and maximize potentials and effectiveness of NGOs in development work. Wednesday concluded with a wonderful social event where the participants enjoyed Czech food and beer and had time to get to know each other better during an informal setting.



Thursday, 30th April 2015

The Thursday session began with a lecture on the work of the UNDP (United Nation Development Programme) on the Salomon Islands in the Pacific. Mr. Ladislav Koubek presented his specific tasks and duties on the Salomon Islands and also gave a personal insight into working in the field. After a brief introduction to the very diverse cultural and historical context of the Salomon Islands, he focused on the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions which were founded after violent conflicts in recent times.

The second presentation was given by Mrs. Jitka Skovrankova of the NGO "People in Need" where she is the coordinator of the aid programme for Syria. The NGO has its biggest programme in Syria which includes the distribution of food for 80,000 people each day. She then presented the difficulties and challenges under which the NGO has to operate. She not only showed the participants impressive videos of the very difficult and dangerous situation from Aleppo, but also explained the strategies behind the aid programme. According to her, it is crucial to support the already weakened local economy in addition to providing immediate aid relief to the most in need. Another important part of her work in Syria and in the Czech Republic is to coordinate with other NGOs and to provide field-based information about the conflict and its impact.

In the afternoon, the last research team activities took place before the first RAUN session in Prague was concluded. Filled with more knowledge and with much food for thoughts the participants returned to their home universities.

# Conclusion

All participants showed strong interest in the programme and are already very committed to the RAUN. They actively participated in all the discussions and debates and they seemed to have enjoyed the wonderful and historic city of Prague. The students as well as the coordinators are already looking forward to meeting again in Szeged, Hungary in September where the program will focus on the challenges to human rights. In the meantime, students will be working in groups on their chosen research projects.

Many thanks go to all the speakers, the participants and every supporter of the RAUN 2015/16! A very warm thank you also to the organizing team in Prague!

