

# Proposals for a modern, effective, ethical and people-centred United Nations

Georgios Kostakos



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On 3 and 4 September 2019 I had the privilege of participating in an expert workshop on **“The Essential World Organisation: Reinvigorating the UN at 75”**. It took place at the University of Duisburg-Essen in Duisburg, Germany, and was organised by the Development and Peace Foundation (sef.) in cooperation with the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF).

Being there for me felt like meeting my extended family, i.e. people who really know and care about the UN, some of whom I knew already. This sense of tribal belonging was strengthened by the presence of 8 ACUNS members, including the tribal chief, or shaman, our still quite new Executive Director, Math Noortmann. He came towards me with a big, satisfied smile after I had referred to ACUNS in my presentation. What I had said was not a diplomatic nicety, as I really believe that ACUNS is needed at least as much today as it was in the late 1980s, when it was created. Being me I could not but share privately with Math my sense that in recent years the element of academic-practitioner interaction, for me the *raison-d'être* of ACUNS, had weakened and needed to be brought back to the centre of ACUNS activities, beyond the occasional quick UN official appearance or the retired-practitioners-turned-academics very valuable participation.

Even when the workshop participants disagreed in our views or approaches, all of us there spoke the same language and shared a sense of responsibility towards this venerable structure of global governance that is the UN. Certainly there was no John Bolton among us, although I am sure that would have spiced up things further. But there was an honest search for solutions to the many challenges facing the world and the UN as it approaches its 75th anniversary (UN@75). All workshop participants brought up both positive and negative elements of the state of the world body today, so the future did not look completely bleak. Of course, there was a common understanding that a lot needs to be done to make the UN relevant again for the global public that is being led to extreme positions by an increasing number of nationalist leaders.

The workshop was a good opportunity to present the **“Proposals for a modern, effective, ethical and people-centred UN”** that my Foundation, FOGGS, has put forward as a contribution to UN@75. FOGGS promotes a new “Grand Narrative” for globalization, an action-oriented story for humanity and the planet that is inclusive and fair, people-centred and hopeful. Could that be further developed and used to restore the depleted political capital and credibility of the UN? Symbolism matters a lot at this meta-governance level so a global public holiday that would be observed in all countries and territories across the planet—perhaps the International Day of Peace, 21 September, elevated to Global Peace Day, or UN Day, 24 October, declared World Unity Day—could help strengthen the sense of common belonging, as one of the FOGGS proposals goes.

The above personal and anecdotal account in no way reflects the richness and variety of views and in-depth discussions that took place at the workshop, a summary of the proceedings of which is being prepared by the organizers—who also happen to be institutional members of ACUNS!