

LAW SCIENCES

THE UNITED NATIONS AS A SUCCESSOR TO THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

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Humankind is constantly being threatened by the outbreak of new conflicts of various kinds and dimensions. These conflicts result in many socioeconomic problems. Because of this, the establishment and activity of international organizations, which aim at ensuring peace and stability in the world, occupy a leading position in the system of inter-state relations and collective security. Therefore, taking into consideration the undeniable relevance of the topic, it is highly pertinent to analyse the activity of the UN as a successor to the League of Nations and to draw conclusions, does the UN manage to avoid the mistakes of its predecessor in current activity and to resolve disputes between countries through diplomacy?

The League of Nations is the first international intergovernmental organization with a strong political focus. It was founded on the Paris Peace Conference in 1919–1920, following the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, and was formally in existence until 1946, but in fact had disintegrated earlier [1, p. 211]. Although the idea of such an organization had been proclaimed long before the war, exactly the First World War, its consequences and numerous social, demographic, economic and cultural losses became the immediate impetus for the founding of the League of Nations. The world community concluded that there was an urgent need to establish an international organization to promote transnational cooperation and preserve world peace. Such an organization was founded by forty-two countries of the victorious Allied powers at the end of World War I, but at its peak it had fifty-eight members worldwide. The official languages of the League of Nations were English, French and Spanish. Its administrative structure was represented by three principal organs: the Assembly, the Council and the Secretariat. Under the League of Nations, there were international institutions: the International Labour Organization, the Permanent Court of International Justice, and the League of Nations Health Organisation [2].

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In analysing and summarizing the activities of the League of Nations, most experts in history and law emphasize the existence of both positive and negative results. Although, globally, the organization failed in its main task of preventing a new world war, during the interwar period of 1919–1929 the League of Nations had some political success as it managed to resolve about 30 international conflicts [3, p. 48–50]. It also became one of the first humanitarian organizations in the world to establish common standards of working conditions, provide assistance to refugees, combat slavery and drug trafficking, fight hunger, build transport corridors and communications networks, and provided financial assistance to some member countries. Also, thanks to the efforts of the League of Nations, the Geneva Protocol was drafted in the 1920s to limit the use of chemical and biological weapons, and the World Conference on Disarmament was held in the 1930s to make disarmament a reality but failed after Adolf Hitler left the conference and the League in 1933 [2]. Along with the numerous achievements of the League of Nations, there were certain setbacks, the main reason for which, in our opinion, lies in the non-observance of the principle «Practice what you preach». The organization didn't manage to implement its guideline principles. The most vivid illustration of this argument is the policy of «appeasement» of the aggressor (one cannot fail to recall the Munich Agreement of 1938, during which four states de facto decided the fate of Czechoslovakia by «diplomatic» way). The weakness of the League as an instrument of peace-keeping partially arises from the organization's Covenant: only the decisions of the Assembly and the Council on administrative matters concerning the League itself were binding, even the sanctions were actually voluntary because they were recommendatory in nature. The decisions set out in the procedural documents were essential for the application of measures against the aggressor. And the issue is that these important decisions were blocked because of the non-voting of a Member State (one country's non-voting was enough to block the decision). This fact became the subject of abuse by some Member States of the League of Nations very often. According to the Covenant of the League of Nations, war as a means of resolving conflict was not prohibited. The absence of the powerful states among the League of Nations members has played a controversial role in the performance of its activity. In particular, the United States was the initiator of the collective security system but did not become a member of it, and the Soviet Union's participation in the League's work was short-lived: it was adopted in 1934 and expelled in 1939 due to the Soviet-Finnish War. These points also became the factors that have led the League of Nations to get off the international political arena [3, p. 48–55].

However, its disbandment did not mean that the world community had abandoned the idea of joining forces in the struggle for the peaceful settlement of conflicts. On the contrary, devotion to non-violent means and diplomatic instruments for the settlement of disputes between countries then became a catalyst for the creation of a new, improved and effective international organization to consolidate European Governments in the struggle for peace and develop an effective mechanism for collective security in Europe, taking into account the achievements and failures of the League of Nations.

Such an organization was founded in 1945 by fifty-one countries and is known as the United Nations (UN). The UN nowadays comprises one hundred and ninety-three member states. The number of languages recognized as official languages of the United Nations, more than the number of official languages of the League of Nations: Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish, and Arabic. The administrative structure of the United Nations is also more extensive than the administrative structure of the League of Nations, and consists of six principal organs: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the UN Secretariat [4, p. 26–29]. The United Nations has made a significant contribution to international peace and security through political, humanitarian, and military activities throughout the world. Many significant international agreements, treaties, protocols, and covenants relating to the cessation of local wars and hostilities, disarmament, and the peaceful settlement of territorial conflicts, the promotion of transnational economic, cultural and environmental cooperation have been elaborated and adopted within the framework of the United Nations or under its auspices. The Charter of the United Nations established the absolute prohibition of the threat or use of force in international relations and proclaimed the need to settle international disputes by peaceful means. The United Nations Security Council is a body authorized to investigate disputes or any other situations that may lead to interstate or international confrontations. It was established to monitor compliance with the provision about the prohibition of the threat or use of force in international relations, and also to take binding decisions on behalf of all Member States. Moreover, all the great powers for the first time were united and become permanent members of the Security Council exactly within the UN. These are significant conceptual and organizational changes compared to the policy of the League of Nations, which did not include the great powers and could only make recommendatory decisions. At the same time, the weakness of the Security Council arises from the fact that each of its permanent members has a veto that is often becoming the subject of abuse by some Member States, and discussions on questions of principle, in which the interests of the permanent members intersect, tend to lead to deadlock [5; 6].

Despite the fruitful work done on errors of the League of Nations, the United Nations faces the problems of its predecessor: the Organization fails to fully resolve disputes between countries through diplomatic means and to ensure international peace and security. The economic and political sanctions imposed by the United Nations on the offending countries are not very effective, as they usually do not influence the policies of the governments of the aggressor countries. Experience shows that the United Nations sometimes has more success in humanitarian activity than in political one.

So, the first attempt to establish an international organization to ensure peace and stability in the world was unsuccessful, because the League of Nations, unfortunately, failed to develop real leverage over the geopolitical situation in the world and mechanisms for peaceful settlement of conflicts. The United Nations became its successor. The founders of the UN drew the conclusions and learn the instructive lessons from the League of Nations failures in order to establish an improved, high-effective international structure. However, significant challenges to collective security still exist, and the realization of collective security is far from ideal. But let us stress that this does not mean that international diplomacy is powerless. It is important to remember that the UN Charter was adopted in the middle of the XX century. Since the end of the XX century, the issue of United Nations reform has been under discussion. We are convinced that the United Nations has a real opportunity to find effective instruments of influence on the aggressor countries and will be able to embody decisive actions and show integrity in matters relating to the inviolability of borders, the preservation of the sovereignty of countries, and the achievement of collective security.

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