



# **INTERNATIONAL FORUM**

**OSLO, NORWAY**

**February  
NEWSLETTER  
02/2020**

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**Number 451**



# INTERNATIONAL FORUM

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## Forum Diary

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Page</i>
March 2	The UN Ocean Panel and Norway's Role	19:00	5
March 26	Former Central Bank Governor of Iceland, Svein H. Øygard: Preventing the Next Financial Crisis	17:00	4
April 24	Visit to Queen Sonja's Art Stables	TBA	Next NL
April 29	Knut O. Åmås: Understanding Norwegian Society	17:00	5

## From the President



Dear Members,

We are moving! Our office moves to Kronprinsens gate 3. Luckily, the new premises are very close, in fact, on the other side of the courtyard.

Words cannot express our thanks to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for providing the office space. We remain deeply grateful to their support. Moving is tiring, but also exciting because it's like making a fresh start. Our hardworking and helpful Board members, Office and Dispatch Teams are assisting with the move.

We are happy to inform you that two Board events are coming up in March and April. Details are provided inside.

I would like to share with you something I read the other day. A *New York Times* article by neuroscientist Dr. Daniel Levitin was titled 'Everyone knows memory fails as you age. But everyone is wrong. Even 20-year olds forget the simplest things.' We worry that we are forgetting more and more. But this is normal, he says, because never before in history has there been this level of information overload, this never-ending noise, buzz and blur. Older people tend to forget more than youngsters because they have more to remember! He recommends one of the best ways to improve memory is to constantly do *new* things. There is an old, brilliant saying: 'When was the last time you did something for the first time?'

The magic of the International Forum is that our committees present events and talks that provide opportunities to experience many things for the first time – every month.

We are blessed. What a wonderful way to improve memory, stay fit, meet friends and have fun.

See you at our next event.

Best Regards,

*Anita Pratap*

President

*C O M I N G   S O O N*

**BOARD EVENTS**

**Svein Harald Øygard**

**March 26**

Former Central Bank Governor of Iceland

**Preventing the Next Financial Crisis**



Mr. Øygard is a former Deputy Finance Minister in Norway, and has been a Senior Partner in McKinsey and Sparebank1 Markets. He is now an entrepreneur and adviser. His book *In the Combat Zone of Finance* will be available at the event.

DATE/TIME:      Thursday, **March 26**, 2020 at **17:00**

*For more information, please contact IF Office.*

**Knut Olav Åmås**  
**Understanding Norwegian Society**

**April 29** from 17:00 to 19:00



The venue is at the offices of Fritt Ord in Uranienborgveien 2 on the corner of Parkveien. More in the *March Newsletter*.

**MONTHLY MEETING COMMITTEE**

**Vidar Helgesen**

**The UN Ocean Panel and Norway's Role in it**



Vidar Helgesen is a Norwegian diplomat and politician for the Norwegian Conservative Party. He has, among other things, served as Minister of European Affairs, Minister of the Climate and the Environment, and as chief of staff to Prime Minister Erna Solberg. He also served as Secretary General of the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Mr Helgesen will talk about one of the Goals of the UN Panel: the establishment of a new global contract between the sea and humanity.

DATE/TIME: **Monday, March 2** at 18:45 (for 19:00)

*For more information, please contact IF Office.*

## ACTIVITIES

### International Book Club II

The next meeting will be at 13:00 on February 27 at Solrun Kongshaug's home. Dronninghavnveien 2, Bygdøy. The book chosen for the discussion is *The End of Loneliness* (2016) by Benedict Wells,

*'It is a kaleidoscopic family saga of three siblings and a reflection of the power of memory. Some will be lost and other memories we never can let go.'*

If you are interested, please let us know.

**Contact:** Heidi vW Høivik. *For more information, please contact IF Office.*

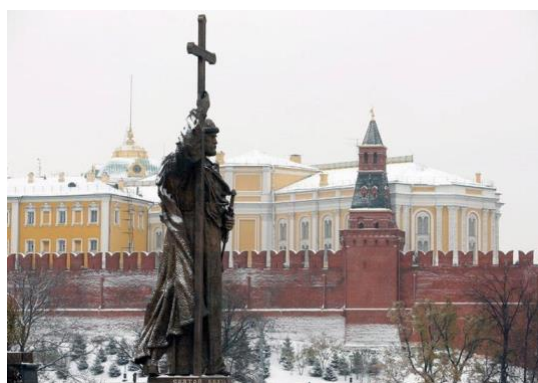
## R E P O R T S

### MONTHLY MEETING

#### Ambassador Skagestad on Russia and Putin

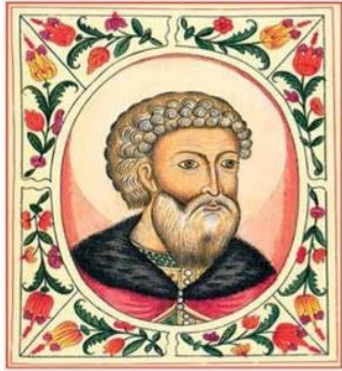
At our first Monthly meeting in 2020, Ambassador Odd Gunnar Skagestad talked about Russian governance, the way the Russian state behaves towards its citizens; and geopolitics, the way the state behaves towards its neighbours. The key elements in order to understand Russia, Mr. Skagestad claimed, are *the country's history* and *the Russian concept and role of power*, both physical and spiritual power, i.e. authority based on ideas and values.

Mr. Skagestad gave examples of politicians and powerful leaders who are long dead, but who still influence the way things are done, and who keep the collective memory of Russia alive. The Lenin mausoleum at the Red Square and the statue of Vladimir the Great are important historical monuments.



The 18-meter statue of Grand Prince Vladimir the Great of Kiev with the cross stands just outside the Kremlin. The statue was inaugurated by the president only three years ago. In his inaugural speech, Putin claimed that 'This man laid

the moral foundations of the lives we live today in Russia.’ The Grand Prince introduced Christianity in the Greek orthodox form to Kievan Rus in 988, long before Russia existed as a nation. He is revered as a national hero both in Russia and Ukraine.



Another important ruler was Ivan III (1462–1505), Grand Prince of Moscow. He started the expansionist policy that eventually led to the establishment of the Russian Empire. In his coat of arms, he adopted the Byzantine double-headed eagle on a red background, as he considered himself the embodiment of the legacy of the East-Roman Empire after its breakdown. Ivan did not use the title ‘tsar’.

Ivan IV the Terrible (1547–1584) was the first to use the title Tsar of Russia. Despite being a ruthless overlord, Ivan was proposed for sainthood because he defended Christian Orthodoxy.

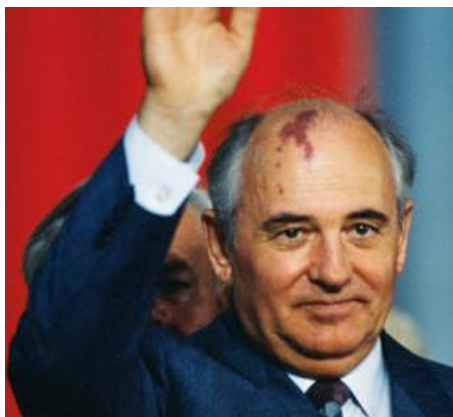
The Russian tsars were people with power and the ability to use it. They were ruthless, but executed their power, stayed in power, and were admired for that.

The last tsar, Nicolai II, inherited power, but lost it and was therefore not respected. He was the last of the Romanov tsars and died after a coup d’état in 1917.

After the Revolution, the ‘communists tsars’ came into power. First Lenin and then Stalin, who inherited Lenin’s project. They both used their power and held on to it.

Mikhail S. Gorbachev (1985-1991) was popular in the West. He inherited power but lost it. He even lost the Soviet’s power and he is despised by many Russians.

Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) introduced freedom and democracy, both incompatible with the Russian form of government. It is like squaring a circle, says Mr. Skagestad.





The Soviet union was a socialist state and its legitimacy was based on Marxist-Leninist ideology. After the disintegration of the Soviet union in 1991, there was no clearly defined ideology, until Vladimir Putin came in as a strong new leader in 2000. He seems to look for inspiration and answers for his project in Russian history.

The historical backdrop makes it is easier to understand why we perceive of Putin as the 'alpha male' and the 'macho man' – horse-back riding or bathing in ice-cold water. He projects the image of a strong leader in a strong state. He demonstrates his physical strength in pictures of himself on a fishing trip and, and his spiritual capital in pictures with himself and patriarch Kirill. Putinism comprises governance and geopolitics.



Internally, Putin's governance is marked by:

- Strong vertical leadership in a strong state.
- Traditional values including worship of the past, orthodoxy, autocracy, and national values.
- 'Passionarost', i.e. self-sacrifice, discipline, loyalty, and courage – the essence of the Russian national character.

Externally, Russia conveys the message that 'We are different.' Foreign policy has become more direct:

- Russian geopolitics legitimises military force and the annexation of neighbouring territories.
- Its assertive diplomacy re-establishes Russia as a major global player, a power that is feared, but also respected by other states for which Russia serves as a role model.
- 'Eurasianism' marks Russia's new partnerships in Asia – China in particular – a move away from the 'morally depraved' West.

*Putinism* involves visual symbols, such as the Silk Ribbon of the Order of Saint George – Russia's Patron Saint – established by Catherine the Great in 1769. The symbols unite Russians in patriotic fellowship.





Mr. Skagestad explained Putin's background and gave an evaluation of the popularity of Putin in Russia, the sustainability of the nation's power, the opposition in the country and how this opposition is met.

There were many questions from the audience and Mr. Skagestad's answers showed his extensive knowledge of the synergies of Norway's big neighbouring country. Mr. Skagestad had brought copies of his book published, *Fra Lenin til Putin. Hundre år som rystet verden* in 2017.

Gunnel Anita Solheim

## ART COMMITTEE

### Visit to the Oslo City Hall



We were not a very large group that turned up at Oslo City Hall, probably because most of us have been there before. However, a return visit is always an interesting refresher; and on this occasion, we had one of the best Oslo City Guides, Ellen Omtvedt Jensen.

Ellen gave us the bigger picture of life in Oslo in the 1940's. Many citizens were dismayed at the red brick building that grew up in front of the shipyard, thinking that neo-Gothic or neo-Renaissance is the standard style for a City Hall. The contemporary art world in Oslo at this time was really quite avant-garde, looking for a new expression for a new era.

The redbrick 'goat cheese' is now a valued building in the world of architecture. The fresco artists knew their Italian maestros, but chose the influence of the French Cubists, mixed with traditional national style.

There is no building in Norway so crammed with art, sculpture and precious artefacts. All the rooms are a celebration of Norwegian history, the Norwegian

people, Norwegian folklore and the Norwegian Nature. The walls and floors are made of Norwegian marble or wood and decorated with frescoes, artworks and tapestries by Norwegian artists. Even the curtains, furniture and carpets are important, and always in Oslo Blue.



The Munch Room, where civic marriages take place, displays the large oil painting *Life* (1910), by Edvard Munch, showing three generations of family gathered around the Tree of Life. The painting made its way from a gallery in Dresden in 1938, via Switzerland, to Oslo. Munch was through his dramatic breakdown, and this work shows a more harmonious and fresh spirit, full of hope for the future.

The couples that come to be married walk into The Great Hall and up the grand marble staircase passing the enormous oil painting by Henrik Sørensen, called *Work, Administration, Celebration*. This monumental work shows young people coming into the city to seek a happy working future.

The Aage Storstein Room portrays history from the French Revolution to the signing of the Norwegian Constitution in 1814. Here is the fairy-tale princess returning after 400 years, the Eidsvoll men, Wergeland and Bjørnson and the first 17<sup>th</sup> May Parade.

The Per Krohg Room shows the city and the countryside through changing seasons in a sacral chapel-like space. Krohg also made space for his experience at Grini prison during the war, where outsize scorpions and insects attack the people.



Willi Midelfart was brave when painting his large fresco for the Banqueting-Hall where frolicking, half-naked youth dance along the Oslo fjord. The Kings and Queen stare from the other walls with traditional resolve, but portrayed with renewed artistic vigour.

Axel Revold celebrates the Norwegian shipping industry in the Festival Gallery, and Alf Rolfsen's fresco in the Great Hall is a monumental common memory of the Occupation.



The City Council Chamber appears sober by comparison, but on closer inspection, absolutely everything you see is symbolic. St Halvard looks out over the chamber from a great tapestry above the head of the Lord Mayor. Together with Oslo's patron saint, and the Seven Virtues, the Council protects the city and its inhabitants.

Of all the artefacts that we saw, this ceramic work has to be the most curious and impressive. A gift from Iceland depicting an Icelandic geyser.



Another unexpected sight is the White Ensign hanging on the right-hand side of the Great Hall before you go up the staircase. Not many people notice this. This is the ensign of the HMS Devonshire. The ship that took King Håkon VII from Norway to England in 1940, and then returned him back to Oslo in 1945. A gift from the Royal Navy.

There was no more time for other rooms, or the outdoor artworks, but Ellen had given us a lot of her own extra time and this was a *tour-de-force* of our very own City Hall. I think we must go back! There is so much more to hear about.

‘Thank you!’ Kerstin and Katarina for organising this event.

Jane Steenbuch

## SPECIAL EVENTS

### Visit to Oslo District Court

On a beautiful spring-like January day, twenty-five Forum members and guest passed successfully through the Security Check into Oslo District Courthouse. Our guide, Nina Gulbransen, the Courthouse Administrator, came to meet us and began the tour by telling us about the Courthouse building and the Art works and decorations within. The building itself, inaugurated in 1994, is truly spectacular both outside and inside. It towers 10 storeys high and contains 58 courtrooms. The hall inside is open right up to the glass roof, shedding fantastic light into the entire building.

The most important work of art, designed by artist Ole Lislerud, is *Lex Portalis*, the Gateway to the Law, which greets us as we enter the Courthouse. It consists of two columns measuring 32 m over nine storeys, with the staircase curving in



between. They are covered in ceramic tiles with inscriptions of Norway's laws, written backwards to symbolise the difficulty of understanding the laws. At the base of the columns a shallow illuminated pool with trickling water created a soothing atmosphere. There were coins on the bottom of the pool, no doubt thrown in with a wish for good luck!



We were then taken up to the second floor. Here is the largest courtroom in the Courthouse. We were told that in 2012 the whole of this floor was used solely for the court hearings connected with July 22 terror attack in 2011. The café for the public is on this floor, and next to it a witness support office where staff from the Red Cross are available to help calm nervous witnesses before they go into court.

Then we moved up to the third floor where we went into a medium-sized courtroom. Nina explained to us the layout of the room; who sat where, and about court proceedings. It was all very interesting and many questions were asked.



Some members found the system of lay judges particularly intriguing. Any member of the public, 18 years or older, apart from persons in certain positions, for example Members of Parliament or County Governors, may be chosen, at random, to serve as a lay judge. Only a very good reason, such as illness, can exempt a person from this obligatory public duty. No qualifications are needed, only that he or she must have a clean record and can speak Norwegian. The professional judge sits between two lay judges, and together they reach the verdict. The principle behind this arrangement is that an accused shall be judged by 'equals'.



Finally we were taken up to the open air terrace on the top of the building. This is for staff only. Standing in the beautiful sunshine we could admire the

magnificent view of the Ekeberg hillside in the east, the glittering fjord towards the south and the town to the west. Nina pointed out the nearby building which houses the Court of Appeal, Borgarting.



View from the roof

Then we returned to the second floor where lunch was waiting for us. After lunch, Nina came to fetch those who wished to attend a court hearing. At this point we thanked Nina for the interesting tour and presented her with a bouquet.

Nina had chosen two cases for us to attend. One was a case of fraud involving six accused. The other was dealing with the third round of the *Jensen v. Cappelen* case which started the day we were there, and took place in the largest courtroom. The Court of Appeal had to borrow this room because their building didn't have one big enough. We went into both these courtrooms.

It was fascinating to sit there and observe the questioning of the accused by the prosecutor. The whole atmosphere with the judges, the lawyers and the accused, and the public watching, made a lasting impression.

Many thanks to the Special Events Committee for arranging this interesting tour.

Rosemary Hauge





## INTERNATIONAL FORUM

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